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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

**Before the**

**House International Affairs Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International**  
**Operations**

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Mr. Chairman:

It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the United States refugee program and some of the challenges facing it. As you may be aware, this is my first formal appearance before the Congress since being sworn in as the Department of State's Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration three and one half short – but action packed – months ago. I understand that your primary focus today will be issues related to refugee admissions but hope that we will also have the opportunity to touch on other aspects of the Bureau's work.

Since receiving the President's call late last summer, I have devoted myself to learning about the myriad complex issues the United States and other concerned governments and international organizations grapple with on a daily basis in striving to assist some of the world's most vulnerable

people. With the assistance of the dedicated professionals in PRM, I entered the job well-briefed on these issues and aware of the magnitude of the task that lay ahead. In addition to establishing contacts within the government, since taking office I have had over 100 meetings with NGOs, representatives of state, local and foreign governments and international organizations. I have visited with a resettlement agency in Rhode Island, met with UN and non-governmental agencies in New York and Geneva, attended a senior migration leadership seminar in Florida, and visited refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda as well as the Migrant Center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

My trip to refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda in March gave me an invaluable opportunity to see some aspect of nearly every activity in which the Bureau is involved in terms of refugee protection/assistance and admissions to the United States. I was able to meet and travel with all of our international partners – UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, and WFP – as well as the NGOs that we are funding in the two countries. I talked with refugees, particularly women, to hear their views on camp concerns and plans for return to Sudan. I heard the stories of women who were not yet convinced that it was safe to go home to southern Sudan; I heard the songs of young girls who had been exploited for their labor and/or for sex. I was able to see first hand the challenges of balancing our admissions and assistance

programs and of balancing funding for life-sustaining assistance for refugees and conflict victims vs. investing in returnee reintegration where that is possible. In particular, I was a bit chagrined to see where education for refugees – one of my passions – could actually undercut the momentum for return, or even act as a magnet for new arrivals.

In Providence, I met staff dedicated to unraveling the myriad complexities facing newcomers each day. I ate lunch in a restaurant owned by a family of Cambodian refugees whose daughter is now in the National Guard. I visited a Liberian refugee woman longing for her children who remain in Africa, and met the owner of a small business who could not say enough about the work ethic of his refugee employees. As a result of all of this invaluable interaction and first-hand exposure to the problems of refugees and displaced persons, I can report to you that I am deeply impressed by the magnitude and complexity of PRM's work. Let me highlight some of the challenges that we face.

On September 11, 2001, I was a private American citizen who, like everyone, was overwhelmed by the magnitude of this violent attack on our country and concerned that our national security be restored quickly. While I read about the struggles of various agencies, I was unaware of the impact these heinous events had had on immigration to the United States.

One small but important component of our overall immigration program – refugee admissions – involves several federal agencies but is coordinate and managed by PRM. For the five years prior to September 11, the program had averaged 75,000 admissions annually. That number dropped to 27,000 in FY 2002 and 28,000 in FY 2003 as new but necessary security requirements were put into place after 9-11. After struggling through two extraordinarily difficult years, through much hard work by PRM, the expansion of the addition of a few new positions in the Admissions Office and implementation of the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System know as “WRAPS”, the program rebounded and 53-54,000 refugees were admitted in both FY 2004 and 2005. We also must recognize the efforts of staff at our principal USG partners – US Citizenship and Immigration Services at DHS and the Office of Refugee Resettlement at HHS – as well as our NGO and IO partners both here and abroad who all helped make this recovery possible.

In addition to the focus on improving the Admissions program’s security-related components, considerable attention has been given to expanding its reach to those most in need. We receive regular inputs from NGO and other partners on possible new caseloads – some of which have been evaluated during inter-agency visits to refugee locations – particularly

in Africa. We have also redoubled our efforts to enhance UNHCR's capacity to identify and refer refugees for whom resettlement is the appropriate solution by supplementing its funding for this purpose. We expect at least 25,000 referrals from UNHCR this year for refugees in Africa and Asia alone.

It is the Administration's view that important national security interests and counter-terrorism efforts are not incompatible with our nation's historic role as the world's leader in refugee resettlement. While we must keep out terrorists, we can continue to provide safe haven to legitimate refugees. Due to national security imperatives, there have been recent changes to the law as well as to the process and we continue to work on ways to harmonize these two important policy interests. It was an important step to have moved forward on the ethnic Karen Burmese refugees in Thailand, and we are continuing to look at further steps necessary to ensuring the harmonization of national security interests with the refugee program.

The precarious situation in Nepal is also affecting U.S. refugee admissions. We had hoped to have initiated by now a program for certain Tibetans as well as the sizeable population of Bhutanese who have been in camps there for fifteen years. We are watching developments in Nepal very

closely and hope to be able to report progress on this important humanitarian initiative very soon.

The Administration remains deeply concerned about the hardships suffered by the North Korean people and the plight of those North Koreans who have fled their country in search of asylum. We have been working with other governments and refugee organizations to find ways to effectively deal with cases of individual North Korean asylum seekers as they arise. Consistent with the intent of the North Korean Human Rights Act, I am pleased to report that we recently have resettled some North Korean refugees in the U.S. However, as we highlighted in our October 2005 Report to Congress on the subject, many host governments are reluctant to allow us to process cases of North Korean asylum seekers on their territory. These countries facilitate the quiet transit of North Korean refugees to South Korea (nearly 1,400 in 2005; 449 so far in 2006), but they fear that USG involvement could disrupt this mechanism by generating unwanted publicity and complicating bilateral relations. Despite these concerns we are pleased to note that recently we were able to successfully resettle six North Koreans in the United States. In order to protect the integrity of this program, and because we do not normally comment on refugees, I cannot provide further details about where they came from and where they are being resettled. We

would be happy to provide a classified briefing to share more information about our efforts in this area.

Mr. Chairman, we very much value and appreciate your leadership on refugee issues and I look forward to working closely with you during my tenure as Assistant Secretary. While we are focusing on Admissions issues today, as you know, there are many other aspects of this vital humanitarian undertaking that deserve attention. I know that the American taxpayers would be proud to learn about the great work that our government does for people in need worldwide and I plan to spare no effort in expanding their awareness. I would be happy to take your questions.